

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Speaker, the world is an ugly place right now. It seems that at every turn there is another crisis—another barrier to peace and prosperity, another obstacle to fight, or another cross to bear. More of our citizens, women, children, and grandkids are turning to something—anything—to mute the pain and create a false sense of peace. Society has been infected by drug addiction, a disease fueled by a loss of hope.

We see it on the news, we watch it online, we feel loss in our communities. This disease is killing our friends and neighbors. Last year alone, over 64,000 lives were lost. That is more casualties in a year than we saw during the height of the Vietnam war.

And this is a war, too—a war being fought in the streets and in our homes. And we are losing. Mothers, sons, daughters, and fathers are dying—from the cold streets of major cities to the quiet fields of rural America—we are all feeling the effects of the opioid crisis.

What can be done? That is a question I have asked countless law enforcement officials, doctors, nurses, addiction treatment professionals, and community leaders. There is no one solution to stopping the opioid epidemic in this country.

This is a man-made disaster. We must face it head on with education and awareness, addiction and recovery services, funding, prescription drug monitoring programs, and prevention. We need to prevent our loved ones from being dragged into the abyss of addiction and hopelessness.

According to the CDC, three out of four new heroin users report abusing prescription opioids before using heroin. There is an easy step each of us can take to help with prevention. We can get rid of our old opioid prescriptions at home. Why chance someone taking them? Why chance your loved one being a statistic?

This year alone, 153 individuals in St. Louis County have already died of an overdose. How many of them started with prescribed opioids? How many started by taking prescriptions from a parent or a family member? If we could have saved just one of these lives by throwing away old prescriptions, then isn't it worth it?

This Saturday, October 28, local law enforcement and the Drug Enforcement Agency will be set up all around the country and in our neighborhoods for National Prescription Drug Take Back Day. They are providing safe and easy locations for you to throw away unused prescription drugs.

I have no idea how many people can, and will, be saved by this one simple act. But multiply this one act times thousands, and now we are getting something done. Mr. Speaker, this is an epidemic this Nation has never seen. This is a disease of our own making.

This week, there is something we all can do. Think about your household. Go into your hidden cupboards and see if you have old prescriptions. I bet you do. Take them. Find your nearest drug take back location and throw them away.

We need to restore hope in this fight, and it won't happen overnight. It will take work, prayer, patience, and vigilance. Hope can be restored. If and when we band together to fight this epidemic, it will happen.

So let's restore a little hope this week. Let's all join the fight to end the opioid epidemic.

□ 1030

THE WHITEFISH ENERGY DEAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIÉRREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, there is something fishy about the Whitefish Energy deal that was reported in *The Washington Post*.

Whitefish Energy, based in Whitefish, Montana, was awarded a \$300 million contract to repair and replace the electrical grid in Puerto Rico. We learned that the company is 2 years old and, as of about 6 weeks ago, had just two employees. It does not have a track record of working on massive projects, certainly not one as massive as rebuilding the power grid in Puerto Rico after a once-in-a-century storm like Hurricane Maria.

The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority did not solicit bids for this contract. They did not do what most power utilities do under these circumstances, which is rely on mutual assistant relationships with other power companies.

In Florida and in Texas—and in Illinois, for that matter—after a big storm, power companies from around the country send linemen and other workers to assist the local company. But that is not happening here. The Florida Power and Light Company brought in 20,000 workers after Irma and, apparently, was willing to send workers to Puerto Rico and help, but the request for help never came.

So what is going on here?

A tiny company that does not have a track record gets one of the biggest contracts to help rebuild Puerto Rico in a no-bid, out-of-the-ordinary contracting procedure.

That is why I wrote yesterday to Attorney General Jeff Sessions and FBI Director Christopher Wray, because I want them to investigate this deal, how it was awarded, why this company got the contract, and whether there is any evidence of it being a sweetheart, corrupt deal to boost business allies and political allies of the President and members of his Cabinet.

I also plan to bring this issue up to the Oversight Committees in this body.

On the surface, the Whitefish Energy deal looks fishy, but when you look a little deeper, the Whitefish Energy deal looks corrupt.

Whitefish Energy is based in Whitefish, Montana. Guess what. That is the hometown of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who used to represent Montana in this body. His son even worked for the company. The chief executive of Whitefish Energy, Andy Techmanski, knows Secretary Zinke; but as a spokesperson for the Interior Department said yesterday, in Whitefish, "everybody knows everybody."

Guess what. That doesn't make me feel any better about the deal.

Go a little deeper and you find out that Whitefish Energy is financed by HBC Investments, which is a private equity firm founded by Joe Colonnetta, who holds the title of general partner.

The *Daily Beast* reported that Colonnetta gave \$20,000 to the Trump Victory PAC, maxed out on contributions to Trump for his Presidential campaign in the primaries and general elections, about \$32,000, then another \$30,000 that he gave to the Republican National Committee. Kimberly Colonnetta, his wife, was also a maximum donor, meaning she gave the maximum allowed by law during the 2016 election to Trump and his various committees.

Now, please look here, and the pictures are right off the Internet. They certainly add additional evidence to the idea that Whitefish and the Colonnettas are pretty chummy with our President and his Cabinet. Right here is Mr. Colonnetta with the President of the United States, the two Colonnettas at the inauguration, and a picture of Mrs. Colonnetta with Ben Carson, one of the President's Cabinet members.

Don't forget, all you kids out there watching at home on C-SPAN, what you post on Facebook stays there forever.

Now, I know that not everything that looks corruption is in fact corruption. Sometimes what looks fishy on the surface turns out to be legit, but most of the time, you know what, it turns out to be corruption.

The reason this matters so much is that, without electricity, we can't get water restored to the people of Puerto Rico. Water doesn't flow uphill without pumps, and those pumps need power. You cannot live without water; you die. Dialysis machines, electrical wheelchairs, refrigeration for baby formula, insulin for diabetics, chemotherapy for those with cancer all require electricity. It is a matter of life and death.

I was just there and saw the suffering of the people in the villages and towns across the island of Puerto Rico. Without electricity, we cannot get Puerto Ricans back to work rebuilding their island and beginning to end the suffering.

Look, the last thing we and the people of Puerto Rico need right now is a fat cat lining his pockets with money because they are well connected.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. That money should be saving lives, not ending them.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. That is why I demand the FBI and the Attorney General investigate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman will suspend.

Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

INNOVATIVE APPRENTICESHIPS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. FERGUSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the PARTNERS Act, legislation I am introducing this morning with my friend, Representative BONAMICI from Oregon.

Our bill would establish a grant program to support the creation and expansion of innovative apprenticeships that prepare our workers for 21st century careers.

In the Third District of Georgia, the CEC in Newnan has led Georgia by implementing an apprenticeship model, and since then, we have seen apprenticeships continue to expand across our great State.

I, along with Ms. BONAMICI, are introducing the PARTNERS Act today to bring more programs like this to students and workers across the Nation.

By funding this grant with already existing H1-B visa fees, which are collected from foreign visa applicants, we are ensuring that workers can receive immediate work-based training at no cost to the American taxpayer.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. BONAMICI) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be on the floor this morning to introduce bipartisan legislation with my colleague on the Education and Workforce Committee, Congressman DREW FERGUSON from Georgia.

Our bill, Promoting Apprenticeships Through Regional Training Networks for Employers' Required Skills Act, or PARTNERS Act, will help close the skills gap by increasing opportunities for small- and medium-sized businesses to establish apprenticeships and work-based learning programs.

When I visit communities in north-west Oregon, I hear from many Oregonians who still feel left behind because they don't have the skills they need to compete in today's economy. They are not alone. Many jobs today do not require a 4-year degree, but do require more than a high school diploma. In fact, those jobs make up about 53 percent of today's labor market, but only 43 percent of today's workers are trained at this level.

This creates a skills gap, leaving businesses struggling to find workers

with appropriate skills, and workers without meaningful pathways to better paying jobs.

I hear from employers and workforce organizations about the importance of a qualified workforce. They want to identify new opportunities to strengthen skills training.

Apprenticeships and work-based learning programs are a win-win. They provide individuals with paid, on-the-job training and classroom instruction. Employers can align training with the skills they need at their workplaces, and workers can learn while they earn.

Unfortunately, small- and medium-sized businesses often lack the infrastructure and resources to establish apprenticeships or work-based learning programs on their own. So the PARTNERS Act addresses this by establishing a grant program to support the creation and expansion of industry and sector partnerships that will help small- and medium-sized businesses develop work-based learning programs and provide support programs for workers.

Industry and sector partnerships will bring together employers, education, training, labor, and community-based organizations to develop work-based learning programs that benefit workers and the economy as a whole.

In Oregon, these partnerships could address, for example, workforce development needs in rapidly growing sectors like healthcare and technology.

Under the PARTNERS Act, the partnerships would use grant funds to recruit workers, develop training curriculum, and provide workers with access to tools, work attire, transportation, childcare services, and mentorship support. These support services help businesses retain employees and help workers balance caring for and providing for their families.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, this bill results in no additional cost to taxpayers because it authorizes the use of 50 percent of the funds deposited in the H1-B nonimmigrant petition account, and these will be used by the Department of Labor for the partnership grants. This funding source was suggested by the administration in a June 2017 executive order on apprenticeships.

Through stronger investments and work-based learning programs, we can build pathways to get more people back to work, to provide our Nation's businesses with the workforce that will improve productivity and efficiency.

I thank Mr. FERGUSON for his leadership, and I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this bipartisan legislation that will help people in our districts across the country access good jobs.

TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, today we will begin a journey that has

been represented to be a lifeline for the American people in long awaited tax reform.

Sad to say that this is not a bipartisan bill. In addition, it is a bill that will cause a great deal of challenge to the American people.

For example, in moving firms across the ocean, overseas, the American people should know that those companies, in the construct of this bill, will cause them to be exempt from taxes forever.

In a discussion this morning, I heard that it will not boost the economy. The American people should know that it will destroy, undermine, crush the economy.

The representation of the level of growth is a misnomer. Take, for example, in 1986, in the tax reform, there was no surge in job creation after the Reagan tax cuts. There was no high numbers of blossoming jobs. Many in my congressional district need jobs.

It will be borrowing from the future and it will be a burden on our children, our children's children, and their children. But the most devastating part is the bill that we will be paying, the actual dollars to pay down the deficit.

Of course, it should be known that we have examples that no jobs will be created. In 2004, for example, when there was a repatriation from companies regarding their taxes, there was no creation of jobs that we can even recognize. Most of the money went for stock buybacks.

Now, I know that sounds completely technical, but let me be very clear. The question has to be: What will the middle class working families get?

I can assure you, it will be close to zero.

There are 2 million households, for example, in the State of Texas that will be impacted by not allowing the exemption of State and local taxes. We don't know whether mortgage deductions will be allowed, charitable tax credits. So if you have in some way been deducting, for example, those State and local taxes, you will not be able to do them anymore. That will be a great burden on the working families of America.

So my caution to the business community as well as the small businesses, families: Be very careful what you buy into. We will have discussions to provide you with that detailed analysis. The key is a distribution table. What and whom will get the most money.

As the bill is presently written, middle class working families, don't look for relief in the Ryan-McConnell tax bill. It will all go to the top 1 percent. They will relish while, you might not be jealous, but you will certainly be poorer for it.

OPIOID CRISIS

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to also entertain the questions about the pending opioid announcement of this White House. I want to bring to the attention the article in The New Yorker on the empire of pain.